

# ***Sedekah Bumi* (Earth Charity) as a Means of Social Interaction Amongst Religious Communities in Kalimangli Subvillage, Karang Tengah Village, Tuntang District**

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**Abstract.** Dusun Kalimangli, Karangtengah Village, Tuntang District, Semarang Regency, possesses a local wisdom known as '*sedekah bumi*' (earth charity). The implementation of *sedekah bumi* occurs annually through three main activities: cleaning the streets and rivers, a cultural parade followed by a communal meal, and a shadow puppet (*wayang kulit*) performance. This study aims to explore how *sedekah bumi* serves as a medium for social interaction among religious communities in Kalimangli Subvillage, Karang Tengah Village, Tuntang District. The research adopts a qualitative descriptive research method, employing social interaction theory and social action as analytical tools. The findings reveal that *sedekah bumi* acts as a medium for social interaction among people of different religions. It is evident that all residents of Kalimangli Subvillage, regardless of their religious background, come together to collectively clean the streets and rivers, prepare offerings, create ceremonial structures, and participate in a cultural parade. They wear traditional attire and celebrate the occasion with a *wayang kulit* performance that emphasizes universal values and human virtues rather than focusing on a particular religious narrative.

**Keywords:** *Earth Charity, Media, Interaction, Inter-Religious, Village Ceremony.*

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

Dusun Kalimangli is located in Karang Tengah Village, Tuntang District, Semarang Regency. The subvillage consists of approximately 300 individuals and 90 households, organized into 4 neighborhood units (RT). According to the Village Monograph (2020), the residents of Kalimangli, in Karang Tengah Village, Tuntang District, Semarang Regency, continue to regularly observe the tradition of '*sedekah bumi*' (earth charity).



**Figure 1. Kalimangli Subvillage Area**

Sources: Sutimin (2023)

In the subvillage, this tradition is carried out on Saturday (Sabtu Kliwon), coinciding with the birthday of the first village head of Kalimangli. In an interview with Mr. Elia, he mentioned that the community also believes that as human beings inhabiting the Earth, we have a responsibility to protect the Earth to the best of our ability. This is because the Earth is not

just a dwelling place for humans, but also for animals and plants. It is acknowledged that plants and animals can provide valuable resources for humans. Therefore, from these small contributions, we should express gratitude for what the Earth has given us. From a human perspective, this can be seen as part of an attitude of care and environmental stewardship, where we, as humans, take a conscious stance grounded in a sense of responsibility towards the environment and nature to consistently strive to prevent environmental damage (Interview, September 7, 2023). Sedekah bumi is not only practiced in Kalimangli but also in other subvillages, such as Gunung Sari Village, as observed in the figure below:



**Figure 2. Sedekah Bumi (Earth Charity)**

Sources: Rendy (2023)

The Sedekah Bumi ceremony is a traditional ritual involving the offering of agricultural produce from the community to nature, typically conducted in the month of Apit in the Javanese calendar. This ceremony is often marked by a community feast and kenduren (community dining) held in the village hall, agricultural fields, or other places considered sacred by the villagers. The tradition has been passed down from our ancestors and has flourished on the island of Java (Tourism Office, 2022). During the event, the entire surrounding community celebrating the sedekah bumi tradition comes together to make a 'tumpeng' (cone-shaped rice dish) and gathers in a designated location, often at the village elder's residence, village hall, or other agreed-upon sites considered sacred by the local community to conduct the ritual of sedekah bumi. Subsequently, the community carries the tumpeng to the village hall or the designated location for blessings by the village elders. After receiving blessings, the tumpeng is returned to the local community that made it. The tumpeng, now blessed by the village elders, is then collectively consumed by the community celebrating the sedekah bumi event. However, some individuals may take the blessed tumpeng home to share with their families (Indramayu Regency Government, 2023)

Sedekah bumi is one of the local wisdoms, defined as the perspectives and life strategies, along with the knowledge possessed by the local community (Putri, 2023). The regular practice of sedekah bumi in Kalimangli Subvillage is a form of gratitude and appreciation from the community towards the land they inhabit. This tradition is carried out in accordance with the ways of their ancestors, usually involving prayers that symbolize the community's gratitude for life, work, and the harvest they receive from the land. Additionally, people bring agricultural produce to be enjoyed collectively after being blessed. Sedekah Bumi is one of the Javanese customs or traditions that is consistently upheld, even becoming a deeply ingrained routine to this day. The tradition is rooted in the philosophy of a religious way of life, and it is believed that sedekah bumi has been passed down through generations since their ancestors. Furthermore, the community emphasizes ethical values that uphold morals and the

dignity of life. Having a worldview connected to spirituality, the tradition aims to honor ancestors and the unseen forces, serving as a standard for Javanese people in their behavior during traditions and communal living.

Sedekah bumi, as a local wisdom, is evidently practiced not only by the Muslim community but also by those of the Christian faith. In this research, it becomes intriguing to explore how sedekah bumi serves as a form of social interaction among people of different religious backgrounds in Kalimangli Subvillage, Karang Tengah Village, Tuntang District, Central Java Province. The objective of this research is to elucidate how sedekah bumi is utilized as a means of social interaction among religious communities in Kalimangli Subvillage, Karang Tengah Village, Tuntang District, Central Java Province. The research findings will be analyzed using social interaction theory to address the research objectives.

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The definition of social interaction according to several experts is as follows: Social interaction is dynamic social relationships that involve individuals, groups, and individuals towards groups, or vice versa (Setiadi, Elly. 2011:63). Soekanto states that social interaction is a reciprocal relationship between individuals, individuals and groups, and groups with groups (Soekanto, 2010:55). Based on the definitions from various figures, it can be concluded that social interaction is a relationship and reciprocal influence between individuals and individuals, groups and groups, and individuals and groups. A social relationship is considered social interaction if two conditions are met: social contact and social communication. Social interaction leads to social actions in society. Humans, as social beings, cannot escape from interactions among themselves. Interactions between humans are caused by various factors that form the basis of every human activity. Events in society essentially stem from the interaction between an individual and another individual (Mahmudah, 2010). Interactions that align with the goals of each individual and group will be followed by social actions.

The social action theory of Max Weber is oriented towards the motives and goals of the actors. In terms of understanding the behavior of individuals or groups, each has motives for undertaking specific actions with specific reasons. As stated by Weber, the best way to comprehend the various reasons why people act is to examine the motivations and objectives behind those actions (Jones, 2010).

There are four types of social action according to Max Weber, namely rational action, value-oriented action, affective action, and traditional action. Rational action involves actions carried out by considering the compatibility between means and ends. Value-oriented action is an action that prioritizes values, emphasizing what is considered right, good, and acceptable in society. For example, when giving something to someone, we typically use the right hand, as giving with the right hand is seen as good and polite behavior in society (except for left-handed individuals). Affective action is an action based on the emotional aspect of the individual. Traditional action is an individual's action that takes into account everything to be done with the traditions, customs, or habits of the community (Muhlis, 2016).

Various types of social interactions according to Soekanto (2010) include associative (mutually cooperative) and disassociative (conflicting) interactions. Associative interactions consist of cooperation, which is a collaborative effort from the beginning, taking forms such as mutual assistance (gotong royong), bargaining, joining (coalition), incorporating (co-optation), and sharing (joint-venture). Disassociative interactions include competition, friction, and conflict. This research will be analyzed using the concepts and theories of social interaction and social action.

### C. METHOD

According to Bungin (2007), research methodology is the procedure detailing how a study will be conducted. This research utilizes a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research aims to describe reality accurately, articulated in words based on relevant data collection and analysis techniques obtained from natural situations. The study was conducted in Kalimangli Subvillage, Karang Tengah Village, Tuntang District, Semarang Regency. The study's focal point is the residents of Kalimangli Subvillage engaging in the village tradition called "mertidusun," which took place on September 15-16, 2023. Interviews were conducted before the mertidusun event, and observations were made during the activity. The researcher also participated in the preparations for mertidusun together with the residents of Kalimangli, conducting interviews and observations simultaneously. Data collection techniques involve efforts to gather materials related to the research, including valid (truthful), reliable (trustworthy), and objective (in accordance with reality) data, facts, phenomena, or information, as stated by Bungin (2007). The type of data used in this study is qualitative, meaning information presented in verbal sentences rather than symbols or numbers (Bungin, 2007). The sources of data include primary data from informants and key figures such as the village head, community leaders, religious leaders, and residents of Kalimangli Subvillage. Secondary data is obtained from the subvillage's monograph, books, and journals. Data analysis is performed through categorization, presentation, analysis, and drawing conclusions.

### D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The ritual of Sedekah Bumi in Kalimangli Subvillage is performed twice, specifically on Friday, November 15, 2023, in the morning from 06:00 to 10:00 AM, known as "besik dalam" (cleaning the road). According to Mr. Suraji, a religious and community figure, the activities of besik dalam and besik kali (cleaning the spring) have been carried out from generation to generation. This is rooted in the beliefs of the ancestors and has been continued to ensure that the residents of Kalimangli Subvillage always receive health, strength, and blessings. The spring source is no longer in use as it has dried up, but the cleanliness activities persist to instill appreciation for water sources as the source of life for generations to come. The road and spring cleaning occurred on Friday, October 15, 2023, at 05:30-07:00 AM, involving all residents of Kalimangli Subvillage. Subsequently, the residents brought traditional rice cakes (ketupat) and side dishes such as rice with mixed vegetables, tempeh, tofu, salted fish, etc., to be eaten together on the side of the road that had been cleaned, as depicted in Figure 3 below.



**Figure 3. The event of "Sedekah Besik Dalam" (Road Cleaning Charity) and "Besik Kali" (Spring Cleaning Charity)**

Sources: Document PM, Kalimangli (2023)

Based on Grandma Siti's interview, the "besik dalam" event is carried out by all residents without considering age, education, religion, economic status, etc. Besik dalam and kali are gatherings of all residents when sweeping, cleaning grass, and especially during communal meals. Mrs. Siti said: *Kulo niki nunggu-nunggu acara besik dalam kalah besik kali tiap tahun, awit saget panggih sedaya tangga ugi sedherek wonten mriki. Mboten kedah neggo pas bodho.* (I eagerly anticipate the road and river cleaning activities because through this ritual, I can meet with my neighbors and siblings, not having to wait for Eid al-Fitr.) Mrs. Siti's phenomenon aligns with Soekanto's statement (2010), which asserts the interaction between individuals and individuals, as well as individuals and groups. Through the road and river cleaning events, Mrs. Siti can communicate and interact with her neighbors and siblings.

On the Friday evening until night of November 15, 2023, the preparations for the "merti dusun" event took place, serving as a means of interaction for the residents of Kalimangli Subvillage. The interaction commenced with the planning of constructing the "gunungan" (a form of traditional mountain-like offering), purchasing materials, creating the gunungan, and culminating in the procession. Members of the Indonesian Protestant Church in the Western Part (GPIB) Tamansari, a service post in Kalimangli, collaborated with residents of the subvillage who practice Islam in a harmonious and joyful partnership. This was evident as they worked together, sharing stories and laughter, as depicted in Figure 4 below. Despite differing religions, the activity of creating the gunungan, which is a communal ritual, facilitated a harmonious collaboration that extended into the night.



**Figure 4. Muslim and Christian Residents Collaborated in Creating the "Gunungan."**  
Sources: Document of PM, 2023



**Figure 5. Mothers of Different Religions Worked Together to Create Decorations for the "Gunungan."**  
Sources: Document PM, 2023

The residents of Kalimangli Subvillage, through the actualization of the Sedekah Bumi activity manifested in road and river cleaning, and the cultural procession, strengthen interactions and evoke social actions. Actions such as the procession and the parade are undertaken with the same goal: to seek blessings and prosperity from the universe and the Almighty Creator for the residents of their subvillage.

On the Saturday Kliwon night, as depicted in Figure 6, it provides a depiction of the offering of Sedekah Bumi in the form of a complete set of 7 types of food, including rice, mixed vegetables, eggs, fried salted fish with flour coating, bananas, and traditional snacks. This symbolizes the food provided by God for human sustenance and well-being.



**Figure 6. The Sedekah Bumi Offering is Placed at the Road Intersection**

Sources: Document PM, 2023

The offerings are placed at the road intersection, a strategic location traversed by all residents of Kalimangli Subvillage. These offerings symbolize gratitude to the giver of life on Earth, expressing hope for continuous blessings and smoothness in seeking livelihoods. Additionally, there is a wish for the subvillage to always be in a state of peace, tranquility, and prosperity without conflicts. The symbolic meaning of the sesajen, especially with the inclusion of "sayur urap" (mixed vegetables), emphasizes the idea that humans must unite and live harmoniously. The balanced taste of urap signifies harmony, conveying the message that individuals, in their interactions, should seek mutual understanding and comprehension not only physically but also spiritually.

Results from an interview with Mrs. Kadus Kalimangli indicate that the "merti dusun" activity involves the participation of all parties, including the sub-district and district governments, which will also be present. As a young female village head, she feels it's essential not to neglect this ritual because it has been carried out for generations, even though sometimes it is done in a simple manner. The selection of the "merti dusun" day is always the same, which is on Saturday Kliwon, and in the year 2023, it falls on November 16, 2023. This year, the activity is carried out with a relatively large budget with assistance from Satya Wacana Christian University and also the Indonesian Protestant Church in the Western Part (GPIB) Tamansari Salatiga, a service post in Kalimangli where there is also a church. Mrs. Kadus stated: Here, the coexistence of people from different religious backgrounds is harmonious, and Javanese traditions are embraced by all religions in this community. So, it unites us, the residents of the subvillage, despite our diverse religious backgrounds. (Interview, October 16, 2023).

The statement from Mrs. Kadus above aligns with Soekanto's (2010) concept of associative interaction, where the residents come together to carry out a social action, namely

the Sedekah Bumi in the form of "merti dusun." This involves participating in a procession, bringing food from their respective homes, and then coming together in a shared dining space.

During the procession or parade, the residents engage in intensive and close interaction, feeling a sense of unity because they share the same goal as a social action, which is to preserve the local wisdom of Sedekah Bumi as an expression of gratitude for the tranquility and blessings bestowed upon them. They hope that this tradition continues in the Kalimangli subvillage. As seen in Figure 7 below, all participants in the procession are residents of Kalimangli subvillage. Despite their different religions, they do not emphasize religious-based worship models; instead, they unite under a common culture, which is Sedekah Bumi. Local wisdom can bring people together and serve as an interactive medium among people of different religions in Kalimangli subvillage, Karangtengah village. Evidence of this unifying interaction is visible in Figure 7 below.



**Figure 7. The Cultural Procession, "Merti Dusun" in Kalimangli**

Sources: Document PM, 2023

In the evening, the expression of gratitude is complemented by a Wayang Kulit performance, accompanied by dance, songs, and speeches from local authorities, including representatives from the sub-district who represent the Regent. Interaction occurs between government actors and the community. Wayang Kulit serves as a meeting point between high and low social statuses, between the wealthy and the less privileged, between government officials and the citizens, and especially among people of different religions. Max Weber classifies these actions as traditional actions, where the community engages in rituals and traditions that have been passed down through generations and may not necessarily be rationally understood. The villagers willingly contribute up to RP.500,000 per family, even though their economic life is relatively simple. The villagers believe that the Wayang Kulit performance, with the stories narrated by the puppeteer (dalang), can bring blessings to the lives of the villagers. After two days of communal interaction, starting with cleaning the streets and the river, and preparing for the cultural procession, they express gratitude with the entertainment of Wayang Kulit. In an interview with Mr. Mul on October 15, 2023, he mentioned that if there is no Wayang Kulit, they feel that something is missing in the village's life. To attract the younger generation, not only Wayang Kulit is performed, but there are also dances by the youth, songs, and chants by the mothers. This allows the youth, mothers, and the community to interact because they have to practice and communicate with each other. Thus, Sedekah Bumi as a means of social interaction becomes even more tangible.



**Figure 8. The Wayang Kulit performance**

Sources: Document PM, 2023

## E. CONCLUSION

The research with the title "Sedekah Bumi as a Social Interaction Medium Among People of Different Religions in Kalimangli Subvillage, Karang Tengah Village, Tuntang District" can be summarized as follows: The Sedekah Bumi activities conducted include cleaning the road, locally known as "besik dalam," cleaning the water source, referred to as "besik kali" in Javanese, offering rituals to the local guardian spirit (mbaurekso), cultural procession (kirab budaya), communal feast (slametan), and Wayang Kulit puppet show. All these Sedekah Bumi activities involve the participation of residents from Kalimangli subvillage, who follow different religions, including Islam and Christianity/Catholicism. Interfaith communication and coordination are evident throughout the planning stages, collective efforts in cleaning the road and water source, constructing symbolic mounts, preparing the venue for the puppet show, and arranging spaces for the communal feast. Through these activities, people of different religions in Kalimangli subvillage engage in friendly interaction, fostering social cohesion and continuing their collective social actions to uphold local wisdom and express gratitude for the blessings received from God, contributing to the comfort and tranquility of Kalimangli subvillage. Consequently, Sedekah Bumi proves to be an effective medium for social interaction among people of different religions in Kalimangli subvillage, Karang Tengah Village, Tuntang District.

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